

Committee on House Administration
Statement by Ranking Minority Member Robert A. Brady
Thursday, March 17th 2011
“Election Assistance Commission Operations and 2012 Budget Request”

I want to thank the Chairman for calling this very important hearing on the Election Assistance Commission and their 2012 budget request. It is our hope that today we can learn from our distinguished witnesses what steps the organization will take to maximize its use of valuable taxpayer resources and to ensure that the EAC is able to fully carry out its important mission.

The EAC was created in 2002 when Congress enacted the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), the bipartisan supported legislation which developed mandatory minimum standards for states to apply in election administration. Under the provisions of that law, the EAC is charged with assisting states with the implementation and enforcement of these standards. I would also note that HAVA was created as a direct result of the 2000 presidential election and the events that took place in Florida. This was at a time when the machine guidelines and voting standards were at the FEC. Now is not a time to move backwards. The FEC has become an agency which deadlocks on the simplest of issues. This sadly is all too typical in Washington.

While I acknowledge that the commission has seen its share of administrative challenges, these issues are fixable. The EAC is the only federal agency created exclusively for the purpose of aiding state and local election officials with their responsibility to administer federal elections. At first that help came in the form of money, later in standards as well as machine certifications, and now in information sharing and best practices, as well as monitoring the money and the standards.

The Chairman has introduced legislation that would abolish the EAC and move its functions to the Federal Elections Commission and National Institute of Standards and Technology. This was done without any input from our side and may be a step in the wrong direction. I have sent letters to both the FEC and NIST asking for a detailed analysis from both agencies taking on the additional responsibilities from the EAC. I expect to have the answers soon and would submit all for the record.

Although we tend to focus our scrutiny on agency shortcomings, it's important to recognize the accomplishments of the EAC. For instance:

- The EAC has effectively distributed \$3.2 billion appropriated by Congress in grant payments for the improvement of elections.
- HAVA transferred the responsibility for developing voting system standards from the FEC to the EAC. As such, they have developed voluntary voting system guidelines that significantly increase security requirements for voting systems and expand access, including opportunities to vote privately and independently, for individuals with disabilities. In other words, they help more eligible Americans vote.
- They have established a program to accredit voting system test laboratories and certify voting equipment.

- The EAC has completed 24 research studies ranging in topic from voter registration and effective ballot designs to free absentee ballot postage and overseas and military voting. The EAC administers the leading national election administration and voting survey, the source of government-maintained data on election administration.
- The EAC has established an award-winning Web site that serves as a national clearinghouse of election administration information. The website was listed as one of the Top % Government Websites by Congress.org.
- In 2010 the EAC certified their 4th voting system in 8 months at a cost under a million dollars.
- They translated the National Mail Voter Registration Form into five Asian languages and expanded versions of the *Voter's Guide to Federal Elections* to include four Native American languages.

It is my understanding that the Chairman is planning to hold a number of hearings in the future related to voting reform. I hope that we can come together to discuss these topics because the act of voting is not a partisan issue – it is a fundamental aspect of our American system of government. Last year we were able to work in a bipartisan manner on military voting and ballot tracking. I hope that will continue, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.